

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, RI



*DSCA: An Old Problem in a New Context*

A paper submitted to the faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the curriculum. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.

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<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> As natural disasters escalate in scale, severity, and frequency, the DoD must grapple with the national security implications that result. While these evolving priorities are now being considered in national security planning, the US must look further ahead and consider what changes to our disaster response apparatus might be made now to better insulate low-density DoD resources in the future. Here, we will focus on the role of the DoD in domestic disaster response; current policy and processes for engaging military resources in a major emergency; and the ways the US might consider adapting historical service auxiliary organizations and expanding current joint interagency frameworks to prepare for an increasingly uncertain future. Proposed solutions include establishment of a national civil support auxiliary and Joint Interagency Task Force-Civil Support.				
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***“The unprecedented scale of recent disasters has spurred continued innovation in response operations and highlighted the need for further progress to build resilient capabilities to respond to disasters of increasing frequency and magnitude.”<sup>1</sup>***

## **Context**

Climate change is rapidly becoming one of the most universally impactful global challenges of our time. At present, climate change affects the United States and its international partners with varying degrees of severity. For the US and many of its industrialized Western peers, these impacts have not yet reached the catastrophic or persistent scale of those that are already plaguing the low-lying island nations of the Caribbean, Indian Ocean, and Southeast Asia or the drought-blighted nations of the African Sahel. However, the scale and frequency of major weather and climate disasters at home is undoubtedly on the rise. In 2020, 104 disaster events in the United States warranted a major disaster declaration by the President.<sup>2</sup> Of these, 22 events caused more than one billion US Dollars in losses—the most events of such a scale in a single year since comparison began in 1980.<sup>3</sup> These crises, whether at home or abroad, often necessitate a rapid national response in order to alleviate human suffering. Although the Department of Defense (DoD) is not the lead agency for disaster response either internationally or domestically, it does play a pivotal supporting role by providing unique, rapidly deployable, and self-supporting resources, personnel, and capabilities in particularly severe emergencies.

As natural disasters escalate in scale, severity, and frequency, the DoD must grapple with the national security implications that result—ranging from competing national priorities for limited military resources, to readiness, training, and infrastructure impacts, to more traditional

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Homeland Security (DHS), National Response Framework, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, October 28, 2019, ii.

<sup>2</sup> Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), “Declared Disasters,” accessed February 14, 2021, <https://www.fema.gov/disasters/disaster-declarations>.

<sup>3</sup> NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI), “U.S. Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters,” accessed February 14, 2021, <https://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/billions/>.

security threats that may be exacerbated by disasters within unstable populations and states. While these evolving priorities are now being considered in national security planning, the US must look further ahead and consider what changes to our disaster response apparatus might be made now to better insulate low-density DoD resources in the future. Here, we will focus on the role of the DoD in domestic disaster response; current policy and processes for engaging military resources in a major emergency; and the ways the US might consider adapting historical service auxiliary organizations and expanding current joint interagency frameworks to prepare for an increasingly uncertain future.

### **DSCA within the National Response Framework**

Established in 1979 with dual responsibility for emergency management and civil defense, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was codified as the lead US agency for national disaster “preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and mitigation” under the 1984 revision of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act.<sup>4</sup> FEMA, now under the Department of Homeland Security, partners with state and local governments to build and reinforce disaster preparedness and orchestrates cross-government cooperation when federal assistance is required in response to emergencies. FEMA’s National Response Framework is the doctrine which outlines and strengthens whole of government response efforts nationally while considering opportunities to enhance local disaster preparedness and mitigation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, Public Law 93-288, as amended, 42 U.S.C. 5121 et seq., §313 “Federal Emergency Management Agency,” May 2019, 96.

<sup>5</sup> DHS, National Response Framework, 2-3.

As outlined in the Stafford Act, state and local governments are presumed to be the first responders to natural or man-made disasters in their areas. If federal assistance is required in emergency, it must be requested by the Governor or tribal government of the affected state. The President has sole responsibility for declaring an emergency or major disaster, thus enabling supplemental federal assistance.<sup>6</sup> When called upon in a federal emergency or major disaster, Defense Support of Civil Authorities (DSCA) is the mechanism by which US military forces and capabilities are leveraged. Events that might specifically require DoD response include “domestic emergencies, cyberspace incident response, law enforcement support, and other domestic activities or [requests for assistance] from qualifying entities for special events.”<sup>7</sup>

DoD offers unique platforms and capabilities, deployable infrastructure, and the command and control required to leverage them. Depending on the nature of the event, requests for DoD assistance may include, but are not limited to:

- a. Defense coordinating officers, planners, and liaison officers
- b. Incident support bases
- c. Assets for aerial imagery and damage assessments
- d. Rotary-wing aircraft for search and rescue
- e. Ground and air transportation
- f. Communication networks and equipment
- g. Temporary medical treatment facilities
- h. Aero-medical patient movement and care in National Disaster Medical System hospitals.
- i. Manpower and equipment<sup>8</sup>

The Army National Guard is one of the leading sources of military manpower and equipment support in emergency response. National Guard forces in a given state can be mobilized under state authority and funding, Title 32 authorities—meaning they are mobilized at

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<sup>6</sup> FEMA, “How a Disaster Gets Declared,” accessed February 14, 2021, <https://www.fema.gov/disasters/how-declared>.

<sup>7</sup> Department of Defense (DoD), Joint Publication 3-28: Defense Support of Civil Authorities. 29 October 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Department of Defense (DoD), Manual 3025.01 Volume 2, “Defense Support of Civil Authorities: DoD Incident Response,” 12 April 2017.

the request or direction of their state's governor, are federally funded as approved by the President, but remain under their respective state's control—or Title 10 authorities—meaning they are mobilized on federal active military duty under national command and control.<sup>9</sup> DoD support in an authorized federal emergency or major disaster may be confined to mobilization of National Guard forces within the impacted state or states.

If the scale of the emergency exceeds the capability of these forces, additional units from other states may be mobilized or additional active or reserve forces from across the full spectrum of military services may be deployed to assist. The deeper and more frequently DoD must reach among active-duty forces and low-density platforms, the more consequential the repercussions can be for the military's strategic readiness.

### **Considering New Methods to Prepare for Future Challenges**

As climate change accelerates and magnifies the scale and frequency of these events, the demand for DoD support will only grow. As already described, DSCA response draws upon existing DoD manpower, equipment, and command structures. This demand signal not only strains resources, it also impacts training and certification processes, unit readiness, and platform maintenance availability. As seen during the 2017 hurricane season, concurrent disasters may also present competing priorities for DoD decisionmakers within the DSCA space itself—a strategic readiness challenge that is only expected to worsen.<sup>10</sup> Preparation to meet future challenges will need to address several major issues: how to expand the pool of personnel

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<sup>9</sup> Military.com, "What's the Difference Between Title 10 and Title 32 Mobilization Orders?" accessed February 14, 2021, <https://www.military.com/benefits/reserve-and-guard-benefits/whats-difference-between-title-10-and-title-32-mobilization-orders.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Klare, *All Hell Breaking Loose: The Pentagon's Perspective on Climate Change* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2019), 166.

available for DSCA missions without impacting combat readiness; how to accommodate domestic deployments for DSCA missions within the maintenance and deployment cycles of low-density platforms (heavy lift aircraft, amphibious platforms, aircraft carriers, etc.); and how to predict, prepare for, and execute those missions on a larger scale and/or with greater frequency. Most daunting of all, the military must seek to balance response to crises abroad with response to crises at home—while the frequency and scale of both continue to rise.

Like tackling climate change itself, there is not a quick fix or single approach that will remedy all of these competing demands. Discussions on the topic range in scale and complexity, from the practical—at some point DoD leadership will simply be forced to refuse assistance due to insufficient resources; to the innovative—considering ways to reorganize active-duty forces to build persistent capability around the DSCA mission. At the grandest end of the spectrum, some consider the need for top-down focus on domestic disasters, offering a twelfth unified combatant command as the solution to centralize DoD capabilities and bring depth and efficiency to tackling disaster response.<sup>11</sup>

Before considering options, we must recall that DoD is not the lead agency for disaster response at home or abroad. Any changes to force posture or structure intended to enhance the ability of the armed forces to support greater demand for disaster assistance must be made with inherent consideration of the *supporting* role DoD is expected to play. With that in mind, pragmatic consideration of how to best serve competing future demands will be in the best interest of the citizens of the United States and of our national security interests abroad.

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<sup>11</sup> Helvarg, David. “We Need a Unified Military Command for Disaster Response.” The New York Times. The New York Times, March 23, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/23/opinion/coronavirus-military.html?referringSource=articleShare>.

### *Historical Precedent*

The US has a rich history of innovating in response to emerging civil defense, homeland security, and disaster response challenges. The Office of Civilian Defense was established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1941 to provide a means to enable coordination of defense efforts between federal, state, and local governments; to provide for the protection of the civilian population; and “to sustain national morale” in anticipation of attacks on the homeland during World War II.<sup>12</sup> One of its original tenant agencies, the Civil Air Patrol, exists to this day.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the Federal Civil Defense Administration established in 1951 provided coordination through federal, state, and local governments to enable civilian preparation for and facilities required to withstand chemical, biological, or radiological attack during the Cold War. That office evolved several more times before moving into the Department of Defense as the Defense Civil Preparedness Agency in 1972, and ultimately becoming the Federal Emergency Management Agency in 1979.<sup>14</sup> The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 resulted in the creation of both the Department of Homeland Security, FEMA’s present parent agency,<sup>15</sup> and USNORTHCOM, the Department of Defense’s lead for homeland defense and civil support.<sup>16</sup> Hurricanes Katrina (2005), Sandy (2012), and the catastrophic hurricane season of 2017 would each precipitate revision and clarification of US emergency management policy and strengthening of the roles of lead agencies and coordination mechanisms.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Franklin D. Roosevelt, Executive Order 8757 Establishing the Office of Civilian Defense. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/209591>

<sup>13</sup> Civil Air Patrol, “History of Civil Air Patrol,” accessed February 14, 2021, <https://www.gocivilairpatrol.com/about/history-of-civil-air-patrol>.

<sup>14</sup> National Archives, Records of the Defense Civil Preparedness Agency [DCPA], accessed February 14, 2021, <https://www.archives.gov/research/guide-fed-records/groups/397.html#397.1>.

<sup>15</sup> FEMA, “History of FEMA,” accessed February 14, 2021, <https://www.fema.gov/about/history>.

<sup>16</sup> US Northern Command, “A Short History of US Northern Command,” accessed February 14, 2021, <https://www.northcom.mil/Newsroom/Fact-Sheets/Article-View/Article/1972077/a-short-history-of-us-northern-command/>

<sup>17</sup> FEMA, “History of FEMA.”



What this near-century of experience can teach us is that the DoD has embraced aspects of the civil defense and emergency management problem set throughout its history, but these problem sets have not remained static. As threats to the homeland change, so too must the emergency response apparatus in order to respond effectively. This history should also remind us that it will not take a revolution in capability to get there—evolution of proven and/or established organizations and agencies has enabled the capabilities we employ today. With that consideration in mind, what capabilities might we reinvent to respond to the challenges of the future?

### ***Reconsider the Auxiliaries***

When President Roosevelt established the OCD in 1941, his intent to “facilitate constructive civilian participation in the defense program” was both pragmatic and admirable.<sup>18</sup> In establishing civilian auxiliary services to support civil defense programs, he energized the domestic population of the United States to respond to challenges the military simply could not while focused on fighting World War II overseas. The success of this initiative cannot be understated—with a small paid staff, the OCD grew a civilian volunteer force of millions whose work during the war would range from blackout and air raid preparedness to scrap drives.<sup>19</sup> As already referenced, its successor agencies would provide outlets for millions more Americans to support civil defense throughout the Cold War through community-based chapters nationwide.

While several federal military auxiliaries survive to this day (the Civil Air Patrol, Coast Guard Auxiliary, and Merchant Marine among them), they serve a variety of functions and coordinate primarily with their parent services if responding to national tasks. Because almost

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<sup>18</sup> Roosevelt, Executive Order 8757.

<sup>19</sup> Stephanie Watson, "How the Office of Civilian Defense Worked," 4 June 2009.

HowStuffWorks.com, accessed 14 February 2021,

<https://money.howstuffworks.com/economics/volunteer/organizations/office-of-civil-defense.htm>

all federal auxiliaries can and do support disaster response missions, a first step to reenergizing them to address the emergencies of the future should be to create a central control node for rapidly activating and mobilizing auxiliary resources.

Additionally, DoD should consider establishment of a wholly new volunteer civilian auxiliary specifically for civil support. Such an organization could be built at the community level with the intent of developing disaster awareness, preparedness, locally relevant mitigation skills and strategies, and broader awareness of climate change-related threats. Further, the existence of such a network of organizations would expedite mobilization and evacuations in times of emergency, as well as streamline communications with local, state, and federal response services. The ability to triage the needs of communities on the ground, or better still, to provide education and tools to enable communities to build resilience against the most severe impacts of disasters *before they occur* would dramatically improve, and likely decrease the total need for, employment of high-end, low-density military capabilities.

The unique feature of civilian auxiliaries is that, while they are codified in US Code and affiliated with the military branches, they are volunteer organizations available to support the noncombat needs of their service and/or the federal government.<sup>20</sup> This status opens the aperture for participation far more widely than conventional recruiting to military service and makes civil service accessible to a much broader section of the population. As is the case with many existing volunteer auxiliary organizations, they also provide a prime opportunity for veterans to continue to leverage skills gained in military service for the continued service of their communities. With more than 200,000 servicemembers transitioning out of active duty every year, the potential

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<sup>20</sup> Title 36 U.S. Code, “Patriotic and National Observances, Ceremonies, and Organizations,” § 40302 – Purposes.

inherent in this population should not be overlooked.<sup>21</sup> In order to effectively leverage such an auxiliary force and efficiently integrate it into wider federal response efforts, a central node for DoD civil support functions must be considered.

### ***A Joint Interagency Task Force for Civil Support***

The uncertainty that surrounds disaster response makes many of the proposed improvements to DoD capability quite difficult to sell. Because climate-related emergencies are often unpredictable in both timing and scale, justifying establishment of standing forces, organizations, and commands to deal with them can seem impractical. The opportunity cost of skilled personnel and low-density platforms literally waiting for disaster to strike could be monumental—particularly in view of the anticipated increase in demand for those forces and platforms across the globe. However, critics decry the lack of preparation, expertise, and efficiency that results from only looking at the problem in times of crisis. To balance the need to build expertise against the requirement not to waste resources, we should look to DoD models that already exist, both in the emergency response space and outside.

Joint Task Force-Civil Support (JTF-CS) is a relatively small but vital command, subordinate to USARNORTH under USNORTHCOM and based at Fort Eustis, VA. Within JTF-CS, 173 personnel representing all branches of service provide command and control for the Defense Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear (CBRN) Response Force (DCRF) on behalf of USNORTHCOM. DCRF is a pool of approximately 5,200 active and reserve personnel from 30 sites nationwide who serve rotational assignments on 24-hour recall for response to a domestic CBRN event.<sup>22</sup> The focus of JTF-CS and the DCRF is highly specialized

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<sup>21</sup> Government Accountability Office, “Transitioning Servicemembers: Information on Military Employment Assistance Centers,” June 17, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Joint Task Force-Civil Support, “Factsheets,” accessed on 14 February, 2021, <https://www.jtfc.northcom.mil/About/Factsheets/Article/1199952/joint-task-force-civil-support-fact-sheet/>.

by nature of the immense implications and potentially catastrophic nature of a CBRN event on American soil. While JTF-CS could be called upon by USNORTHCOM to support natural disaster response as well, such a response is not within their usual scope and could detract from their already critical primary mission. This command model, however, of a permanent staff prepared to provide command and control for the flexible deployment of a much larger force is just the right fit in the disaster response and civil support space.

If we take the existing JTF-CS example and combine it with the example of Joint Interagency Task Forces South and West (JIATF-S, JIATF-W), the resulting organization could enable USNORTHCOM to respond more effectively to the full spectrum of disaster response and civil support DSCA missions. The key feature of a JIATF over a JTF is the incorporation of partners and stakeholders outside DoD to maximize coordination and execution of missions that span multiple agencies and departments. In the cases of JIATF South and West, their mission is counter-narcotics operations, and their stakeholders include DHS, DEA, DoD (USSOUTHCOM and USINDOPACOM, respectively), and others.

Disaster response in the United States is inherently an interagency problem. Establishment of JIATF-Civil Support under USNORTHCOM could leverage a proven solution within a new context. Sourcing a JIATF Director from DHS/FEMA supported by an active-duty DoD Deputy would support the primacy of FEMA as the lead agency for disaster response while providing DoD leadership and experience for managing operational forces. With a headquarters staff enabled by representatives of service, component, interagency stakeholders, JIATF-CS could dramatically enhance DoD's ability to conduct all-hazards monitoring, preparation, coordination, and liaison in anticipation of disaster events. Potential representation from interagency might include DHS (FEMA, USCG, FBI), DOE, and USAID. The opportunity to

bridge seams within DoD is inherent in a JIATF model as well. Liaisons from USINDOPACOM and USSOUTHCOM would link responses to disasters that cross geographic COCOM boundaries, while liaisons from the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) would facilitate response to complex emergencies requiring specialized capability. Most importantly, a JIATF-CS Operations Center would provide command and control for DoD forces during DCSA operations and serve as a single node through which the FEMA National Response Command Center (NRCC), an impacted COCOM JOC or JIOC, the National Interagency Fire Center, and similar disaster response C2 nodes could rapidly coordinate requested or ongoing DSCA support. JIATF-CS would also provide the single command and control node required to activate, coordinate, and deploy civil support auxiliary personnel. Establishment of a JIATF under USNORTHCOM would also establish a toehold for allocation and rotation of on-call DoD resources through the Global Force Management (GFM) process, enabling better protection against implications for training and maintenance periods, as well as more precise tracking of utilization in DSCA roles.

## **CONCLUSION**

Balancing competing priorities is not a new challenge for the Department of Defense. As climate change-related emergencies become more frequent and severe, DoD will increasingly experience competition between domestic and international response missions. While we can predict this growth with near certainty, we cannot anticipate that manpower and resources will grow at the same rate. However, as discussed here, proven solutions exist from similarly challenging times in our history. Opening opportunities for the civilian population to participate in civil support could serve to enhance community preparedness, lessen the impacts of major

disasters, and free up low-density federal and military resources. Similarly, the cooperative nature of the disaster response mission should drive our efforts to improve DoD efficiency in this area. Creation of a JIATF for Civil Support would help to synchronize efforts across government while building greater depth of DoD experience—all while keeping the permanent manpower footprint for DSCA low. As demonstrated, solutions like these and a range of others abound—but now is the time to engage the breadth of our force, its interagency partners, and the American people in the interest of best serving the needs of our homeland in an uncertain future.